

early 1970s at the onset of the severe outbreak of Dutch Elm disease. However, I believe that rather than actually changing from Elm (*Ulmus* sp.) as its larval foodplant, it successfully took advantage of different growth forms of the elm, using the young suckering growths rather than the mature trees of pre-Dutch Elm days.

It is therefore to be hoped that *H. comma* can overcome this pending crisis in a similar innovative manner, and always prosper on the North Downs, regardless of the fortunes of the rabbit. My studies will continue over the winter 1990-91 to re-locate eggs in the spring in order to get some indication of their overwintering success or otherwise.; It will also be important to confirm that the resulting larvae actually accept the *Brachypodium* as a larval pabulum. Wild larvae are difficult to find on *Festuca* growth but I am hoping that the silken structures they abide in will be more obvious in the *Brachypodium*. Damage to foodplant by larval eating should certainly be more distinct on the wider blades of this grass.

Postscript: Unfortunately the follow-up work on the *Brachypodium sylvaticum* was ruined by the ravages of rabbits who ate the small tussocks to the ground, also breaking off the markers in the process. Some ecologists believe that neither *Brachypodium sylvaticum* nor *B. pinnatum* are used by rabbits. My observations on both these species, at least in their spring flush of fresh growth, tell otherwise. K.J.W.

Amphipoea lucens Freyer, the Large Ear, and *A. fucosa* Freyer, the Saltern Ear (Lep.: Noctuidae) in Hertfordshire.

From a total of 246 male individuals of the genus *Amphipoea* caught in the network of 26 Rothamsted Insect Survey (R.I.S.) light traps operating in Harpenden in 1990, 245 were found by examination of genitalia to be *A. oculea* L. One individual, caught on 24th August, is *A. lucens*. The trap which caught this specimen is situated in the middle of a field in intensive arable farmland. No *A. oculea* were caught at this site, or at two others nearby in a similar habitat.

A. lucens is usually absent from England south of a line from the Severn estuary to The Wash, although this species is reported in Heath, J. and Emmet, A.M. *Moths and butterflies of Great Britain and Ireland*, 10, 1983 as occurring in Devon and Somerset. It also occurs in at least two wetland habitats in Cornwall. It may well be present but overlooked in suitable habitats in southern England owing to the difficulty of definite identification without examination of the genitalia. It is possible that routine examination of the genitalia, and less reliance on superficial characters, will reveal regular movements of *Amphipoea* species from their known distributional ranges.

It is relevant to note that a single male *A. fucosa* was caught in a R.I.S. light trap at Rothamsted on 25.viii.1949. Identification was confirmed by examination of the genitalia. So far as we are aware, this record has not previously been published. *A. fucosa* is usually regarded as being a coastal species, though its range in S.E. England does extend some way along the Thames Valley.—ADRIAN M. RILEY and MARTIN C. TOWNSEND, AFRC — Farmland Ecology Group, Dept. Entomology & Nematology, Rothamsted Exp. Stn., Harpenden, Hertfordshire AL5 2JQ.

A plea for legal protection for the Sandhill Rustic (*Luperina nickerlii leechi*) (Lep.: Noctuidae) at its site in Cornwall

Several species of animal and plant are protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, and subsequent Schedules. This Act makes it an offence to kill, injure, take, possess or sell protected animals or to damage places used by them. All birds are protected except a few pest species, as well as all bats. In many cases species are protected that are not threatened and abundance in certain areas is no bar to protection, as the adder (abundant in Cornwall) is now a protected species. Habitat protection is often the most important means of conservation, but many rare species are scheduled even though their habitat is protected, such as the Swallowtail. Protection focuses attention onto a species, stimulating conservation efforts and encouraging the creation of suitable management plans designed to protect the designated species (A.J. Whitten, 1991, Recovery and hope for Britain's rare species. *British Wildlife*, 2: 219-229). Even within a protected nature reserve, legal protection enhances the status of the species, as is the case with the Heath Fritillary on protected sites in Cornwall, Somerset and Kent.

The Sandhill Rustic ssp. *leechi* is under threat because of the following factors:

1. This subspecies occurs at only one site.
2. Access to the site is unrestricted, including by 4-wheel drive vehicles.
3. The site is heavily used by holidaymakers.
4. It is easy to collect, and has been collected in the past.
5. The site has been recently damaged by construction work.
6. The site is vulnerable to winter gales.

Legal protection for the Sandhill Rustic would help limit damage under items 2-5. It would make collection illegal, control damage by construction workers and encourage management of the site to discourage over-use by people and vehicles. The site could be managed to encourage the spread of the larval foodplant, *Elymus farctus*. Careful single-species conservation often increases the conservation value of an area, particularly for other insects, as has happened at the Cornish site for the Heath Fritillary. Nothing can be done to avoid the threat of factor 6.—ADRIAN SPALDING, Lerryn Cottage, Lostwithiel, Cornwall.